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New York

President: Mr. Deiss ..... (Switzerland)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 13 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

The President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on agenda item 13 jointly with agenda items 115 on the follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit and 120 on the strengthening of the United Nations system at its 52nd plenary meeting on 23 November 2010.

Members will also recall that, under agenda items 13 and 115, the Assembly adopted resolutions 65/1, 65/7, 65/281 and 65/285 at its 9th, 41st, 100th and 105th plenary meetings, respectively. Also under agenda item 13, the Assembly adopted resolutions 65/10, 65/234 and 65/309 at its 52nd, 72nd and 109th plenary meetings, respectively.

By way of an opening remark, I would like to share some thoughts with the Assembly. We have met today to address the challenges related to realizing the human right to water and sanitation and to consider the impact of the realization of that right on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I extend a very cordial welcome to His Excellency President Evo Morales Ayma, whose country, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, is an ardent upholder of this right. I also extend my warmest welcome to Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, who will also be participating in this afternoon's discussions.

In July 2010, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/292 on the human right to water and sanitation. That decision was a first step towards the explicit acknowledgment of the right to drinking water and sanitation as a human right. Thereafter, in September 2010, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution asserting the right to water and sanitation as deriving from the right to a dignified life and an acceptable standard of living.

For millions of people, access to safe drinking water and sanitation is an urgent development need. MDG 7 calls for the halving by 2015 of the proportion of the global population with no access to drinking water and sanitation. The realization of this Goal is crucial to achieving others, such those concerning poverty reduction, child health and education for all.

The progress achieved after 10 years of effort has been inadequate. There are still 1 billion people with no access to drinking water and more than 2 billion without basic sanitation services. I welcome and support the initiative "Sustainable sanitation — the five-year drive to 2015", launched by the Secretary-General last month.

These figures, along with the drought currently afflicting the Horn of Africa, recall for us the scale of the inequality in today's world with respect to meeting our water needs. While in some regions men, women

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and children die because they lack just a few litres of water, in other regions water is wasted. The human right to water and sanitation is therefore critical to ensuring that everybody enjoys a dignified and free life.

As we will have the opportunity to discuss today, we face many challenges, such as, in many cases, the absence of functional State institutions and limited technical and financial resources. Realizing these rights would represent progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goal on water and the totality of the MDGs.

The 2015 deadline leaves us very little time to take decisive action. In the spirit of the commitment that we made at the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, which opened the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly in September 2010, and in the spirit of the Secretary-General's initiative that I just mentioned, we should daily reaffirm our collective will to achieve the Goals and redouble our efforts to do so. I hope that the Conference on Sustainable Development to be held next year in Rio will spark a new impetus to achieve universal access to water and sanitation.

Today, we have an excellent opportunity to send the message that we have the will to succeed. I encourage speakers to emphasize practical, results-oriented approaches to making the right to water and sanitation a reality.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: At any one time, close to half of all people in developing countries are suffering from health problems caused by poor water and sanitation. Together, unclean water and poor sanitation are the world's second biggest killers of children. While progress is broadly on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal target of reducing by half the number of people without access to safe drinking water, the world will miss the sanitation target. I therefore welcome this plenary meeting.

Last July, the General Assembly recognized the right to water and sanitation. Then, in September, the Human Rights Council specified that this right is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living. Those were important advances. They provide a solid legal framework for Governments and the United Nations system alike. The task now is to translate that commitment into specific obligations at the international and national levels. Only then can people — and especially the poor — realize this right.

Let us be clear — a right to water and sanitation does not mean that water should be free. Rather, it means that water and sanitation services should be affordable and available to all, and that States must do everything in their power to make that happen. It is not acceptable that poor slum-dwellers pay five or even 10 times as much for their water as wealthy residents of the same cities. It is not acceptable that more than 1 billion people in rural communities live without toilets and have to defecate in the open. It is not acceptable that wastewater from slums, farms and industry is allowed to pollute the environment.

Last month, the United Nations launched the "Sustainable sanitation — the five-year drive to 2015" initiative. I spoke then of how the lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation adversely affects children's health and development. I also told of how good sanitation can boost our efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and malaria, simply because people living in hygienic conditions are better prepared to fight off other diseases. I also pointed out that good sanitation and hygiene can increase school performance and reduce absenteeism, especially among adolescent girls, thereby contributing to their empowerment and equality. In short, improved sanitation can contribute to all our development goals.

Many Governments have already included the rights to water and sanitation in their constitutions and domestic legislation. Those Governments that have yet to do so should follow suit without delay. We must reach all those who are denied the water and sanitation services that are necessary for their dignity and well-being. Today, my mind is on the emergency in the Horn of Africa. Millions are struggling merely to survive and scarcely enjoying the full range of their rights. They need immediate assistance, from food and water to adequate sanitation in the camps to which many have been forced to flee.

Such short-term relief, however, must be linked to long-term sustainability. That will require an agricultural transformation that improves the resilience of rural people — especially pastoralists — and minimizes the scale of any future crisis. It means working to realize the right to water and sanitation for

all. It means creating the conditions of security necessary for people and communities to thrive. Water, sanitation, stability, prosperity and peace — these goals are closely, inextricably linked. Progress can be ours if we work together.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

President Morales Ayma (*spoke in Spanish*): I come here today to express my deepest respect and admiration for the United Nations, first of all for holding this meeting, and also because a year ago here in the General Assembly adopted an historic and unprecedented declaration on the right to water as a universal human right (resolution 64/292).

That leads me to believe that this new millennium will offer the chance to make up for the harm inflicted on the peoples of the world. If today water is a human right thanks to the General Assembly, then water is the mother of all rights. If presidents, Governments and States do not guarantee water as a human right, they will certainly respect no human right anywhere in the world. I therefore believe that we can make significant progress in the United Nations in ensuring the enjoyment of human rights, fulfilling the aspirations of our peoples.

If water is a human right, it must stop being a commodity in private trade. It must be a public service. If water is a human right, it cannot be subject to commerce in the hands of mercenary companies. In issuing this declaration on water as a human right with the approval of the United Nations, we share the obligation to work together and share our experience in order to implement policies to ensure that water can be enjoyed as a human right.

I take this opportunity to give voice to the suffering of the peoples mentioned by the Secretary-General. Children lose their lives and farmers cannot work because of a lack of water. As is the case with any right, the right to water must be respected. And human rights have opponents — policies that lead to inequalities or inflict injustice on people. Water, too, has its opponent; the enemy of this natural resource is global warming. Global warming is water's chief enemy, thanks to which last year my country endured the worst year of drought, frost, and low temperatures. In Bolivia's Amazon region, millions of fish died as a result. On the high plateau, people have had to leave their homes and travel in search of water.

The effects of global warming are a very serious problem that we have had to address through our own efforts. However, as a responsible Government, we are experimenting with new policies under the My Water programme. We are investing more in water, for without water there can be no life. Without water, there can be no food. Without water, there can be no planet Earth. It is thus the obligation of the Governments of nations to guarantee this natural resource, so vital to life.

Fortunately, in Bolivia, thanks to the conscience of our people and our democratic nation, the right to water is enshrined in our Constitution and we therefore have a duty to implement it. With this policy, through our My Water programme, together with our 337 municipalities, we are beginning to prioritize projects and programmes that are not just the initiative of one mayor or one President but respond to the needs of the beneficiaries of our natural resources, such as drinking water for people and water for crops and livestock.

Some representatives may say that providing water for livestock is ridiculous, but there are families whose livelihood depends on animals, and those animals need water. When there is no water on the Bolivian high plateau, families can abandon their communities and their land, but they cannot abandon their livestock. Their livestock are at the mercy of nature. During the rainy season, of course, families return to their lands and recover those animals that have survived the drought. The bodies and skeletons of dead animals strew the fields, but some survive. This is a result of global warming. It affects water; it destroys families, particularly those of poor peasant farmers.

This experience has been a wake-up call to us to implement this programme. Our expectations are high. We have invested $100 million for 10 million inhabitants of Bolivia. We wish to go further by sharing this experience with the Assembly, and to share in other experiences from other countries. I have come here to learn from other speakers. I want to learn from those here and from other leaders in the United Nations how we can complement one another in guaranteeing water as a public service. Alone, we surely cannot solve this problem or those that occur in other regions,

countries and continents. We have a duty to think hard and long.

It must not be that in some countries water can be wasted as a luxury, as it is in some countries where people are heedless of how it should be shared but rather compete for it. There is no place for competition here. As developing countries, we have major differences that divide us. Competition of any kind will not solve the problems of poverty or unemployment. But if we can work by cooperating with one another, surely we can do it. Our work, struggle and task are to seek a balance among all human beings.

The United Nations has taken important measures around the world. We have heard that, in some regions, referendums will be held to decide whether water will be a right, a private commodity or a public service. Some 80 or 90 per cent of the people will vote for water as a human right and a public service, and not a private commodity. We do not want to see some multinational companies, as has happened in Bolivia, privatizing water to profit from its sale. How can we sell water? How can water be a private commodity?

We — rural and urban social movements, workers, professionals and intellectuals committed to their countries, indigenous peoples, coca growers — condemn such competition. The year 2000, when we expelled some multinational companies, was a momentous time for us. Some businesses had sought to increase the price of water by 500 per cent. These events led us to think hard and deeply. Through these social movements, we organized and rewrote our Constitution; and we have come to raise these issues in international forums with great respect for the policies and programmes of every country. It is our obligation to share our experiences, as it is for every country to do for the good of the community.

I come from the Bolivian people with our policies to greet the leaders and ambassadors of the United Nations, who a year ago declared here, with great wisdom and intelligence, that water is a human right. If it is a human right, it is now our responsibility to implement that policy defined by the United Nations. I commend the Secretary-General and the Assembly for those policies. We will always be willing to share our experience here.

The President (*spoke in French*): I have invited the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, to participate in this meeting.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the decision just taken and without setting a precedent, I now give the floor to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Ms. De Albuquerque (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank you, Sir, for inviting me to participate in this important meeting. It is an honour and a pleasure to be here today to assess the progress achieved and the continuing challenges with regard to the realization of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

(*spoke in English*)

When, exactly one year ago, following the historic General Assembly vote on the right to water and sanitation (resolution 64/292), journalists asked me about the impact of the recognition of this human right, I immediately recalled the wise words of Eleanor Roosevelt, who said that human rights begin in small places, close to home. And unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Hence today, as we gather to celebrate the first anniversary of the adoption of the resolution, we must ask ourselves the same questions. Will this resolution have any impact on the lives of the billions of people who do not have access to safe water and sanitation? Will it help to prevent the roughly 1.5 million child deaths that occur each year due to water- and sanitation-related diseases? Will it lead to improvements in schools where water is lacking and girls drop out because there are no sex-segregated toilets? Will it help to change the situation in hospitals that are without water and sanitation and face high rates of maternal mortality?

Fatima and John are examples of the billions of people suffering from a lack of safe water and sanitation. I met Fatima and her daughters in one of my country missions. They had to walk for hours every

day to fetch water. They could not work or attend school because much of the day was spent in this task. The family often suffered from diarrhoea, and one friend had almost been raped the day before I met them while walking to fetch water.

Two years later, I met John, a homeless man, during another of my missions. The public restrooms in his city had been shut down. John became, as he put it, the sanitation technician for the local homeless community. He improvised a toilet inside a tent where people would defecate into plastic bags. John would then collect and carry away the faeces on his bike, trying to find an open toilet where he could empty the bags.

These human rights violations must be stopped. Resolution 64/292 must serve as the guide for putting an end to the suffering of all the Fatimas and Johns in the world. Am I expecting too much from a resolution of the General Assembly when I expect it to have a tangible impact on people's lives? I do not think so.

The challenges are and will remain great, but the experiences already occurring around the world show that the recognition of water and sanitation as human rights can truly make a difference.

What has the recognition of the right to water and sanitation achieved? When both the Assembly and the Human Rights Council adopted resolutions recognizing water and sanitation as fundamental human rights, States undertook very clear commitments. They recognized that water and sanitation are derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and must, as has already been mentioned, be available in sufficient quantity, accessible, safe, affordable and culturally acceptable to all, without discrimination.

These resolutions raised political attention and helped to crate the sense of urgency that is badly needed to improve access to water and sanitation in the world. In this context, I praise Bolivia, Germany and Spain for their leadership in this regard at the United Nations level. These resolutions entail a new vision for the world we live in — a world where everyone has access to safe water and sanitation; a world where people do not get sick from the water they drink or make other people sick because they are forced to defecate in the open; a world where people do not have to choose between taking their child to the doctor and paying their water bills.

This new vision requires a shift in the mindset of policymakers, national Governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, the private sector and the people themselves. It means that the most vulnerable, the poorest, the indigenous, the slum-dwellers and the homeless — those who are usually voiceless — are no longer left behind and are prioritized in policymaking. This new vision means that ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation is not a gesture of charity or simply a good idea for policymakers. Unlike human rights, good ideas are subject to changing political currents. Good ideas are not legally binding.

Does this mean that human rights ignore the resource limitations every State may face, or the impact of crises? Of course it does not. By recognizing the rights to water and sanitation, States are expected to take deliberate steps to progressively realize these rights, making maximum use of available resources while putting an end to all forms of discrimination in providing access to water and sanitation.

A great deal of progress can be made, even within a climate of limited resources, such as that which we are facing right now. Some of these steps are, for example, the recognition of these rights in national legislation, the adoption of national action plans for the realization of the rights to water and sanitation, and putting the priority on unserved or under-served communities so as to provide a minimal level of access for everyone.

Since the explicit recognition of the right to water and sanitation last year I have received repeated requests for help from Governments, NGOs, service providers and United Nations agencies that want to implement these human rights but need assistance and guidance in doing so.

Over the past three years, I have been collecting good practices. I have received over 200 submissions from the five continents, and I will present a compendium to the Human Rights Council in September. These practices cover a diverse array, demonstrating that there is no single path and showing that the realization of the rights to water and sanitation is within reach.

Let me share some of the examples that I came across. One of them is the arbor loo ecological type of sanitation introduced in different countries, including Malawi, which aims to compost faeces directly in a pit

and to subsequently grow a fruit tree — normally a banana tree in Malawi — on this very fertile soil. Selling the bananas becomes a way for the arbor loo owner to make money to pay for this sanitation solution.

Equally, national legal instruments are important tools for the protection of the right to water. In a recent court decision in Botswana, for example, indigenous communities who were evicted from their land and saw their water borehole dismantled successfully brought suit under the country's Water Act. The Appellate Court, informed inter alia by the Assembly's resolution, noted that the water law allowed anyone occupying land to drill boreholes for domestic use without specific water rights and that limiting this right could amount to cruel or inhumane treatment prohibited under the Constitution.

At the global level, I am glad that, thanks to my mandated cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN-Water Global Annual Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water report will next year include more information related to issues such as national recognition and justifiability of the rights to water and sanitation, as well as public participation and non-discrimination.

Also, the UNICEF-WHO joint monitoring programme, which reviews progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal targets related to access to water and sanitation, is working closely with me in the development of new indicators that will take into account human rights criteria. I am also leading a task force charged with developing indicators to measure non-discrimination and equality in the access to safe water and sanitation.

In this context, let me call on all States Members of the United Nations to apply human rights to the water and sanitation framework when negotiating the post-2015 global development agenda. This is crucial because the current MDG framework does not measure the impact of discrimination on access to water and sanitation. Hence a State can be an MDG hero while having left unchanged the fate of indigenous peoples, slum dwellers, or people with disabilities.

Furthermore, water quality is not yet being monitored worldwide. Affordability of, and the distance to, water and sanitation services are not being assessed at the global level. The harsh reality is that we simply do not know how many people have access to water and sanitation that meets the standards stipulated by the human rights framework of availability, quality, accessibility, affordability and acceptability that the States Members of the United Nations supported last year. Now, and even long after the MDG timeframe has expired, the global development agenda must be aligned with the human rights commitments undertaken by the Assembly.

The lessons I learned over the past three years while conducting missions and meeting with communities and policymakers who work to improve access to water and sanitation demonstrate that these rights are, as I said earlier, within reach. This is true even in countries and communities with very limited resources, even in emergency situations. Of course, numerous challenges remain, including financial and purely technical obstacles. However, I must emphasize that political will and sound management continue to play the most decisive role in the expansion of access to water and sanitation of good quality.

In this spirit, I would conclude by calling on all relevant stakeholders, including States, United Nations agencies, donors, civil society and the private sector to use the human rights framework in all their efforts, at the national and global levels, to ensure access to water and sanitation for all. The point of departure provided by the recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation by both the Assembly and the Human Rights Council is a vital tool in this endeavour. By applying this framework, the results of interventions will be better, outcomes will be more successful and impacts will be more sustained.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Assembly that there are 35 speakers inscribed on my list. I call on all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable maximum participation, otherwise the debate will continue early next week.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the European Union.

Mr. Serrano (European Union) (*spoke in Spanish*): Before I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU), I should like to welcome the participation in this meeting of the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales, and to thank him for the leadership he has shown in connection with this very important issue and for his statement this afternoon. I welcome also the statement

made by the Secretary-General and the participation of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this declaration.

Mr. President, the European Union would like to thank you for having organized this meeting of the General Assembly on a topic of the utmost importance. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is essential for people to live in health and dignity. All countries bear the responsibility of ensuring that people enjoy their full human rights and that they have equal access to health care, education, safe drinking water and sanitation, and social and other basic services. The European Union acknowledges the recent recognition of the human right to water and sanitation by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council's specification that this right is part of the human right to an adequate standard of living.

While also recalling that there are different positions within the United Nations membership on the relevant resolutions, the European Union believes that it is important that the international community demonstrate united political will to address the global water and sanitation crisis.

In addition, the management of water resources affects all sectors that are important for inclusive growth and sustainable development, such as energy generation, agriculture, food security and the environment, as well as peace and security.

As a result, there has been a growing international recognition among policymakers of the importance of water and sanitation for sustainable and human development, including thanks to the work of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community made access to safe drinking water and sanitation a top priority. On this basis, we have collectively made substantial headway towards reaching this goal.

However, there is no room for complacency, as access to safe drinking water and sanitation remains a matter of life and death for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Some 884 million people still lack access to improved water sources, while more than 2.6 billion people lack access to acceptable sanitation.

Furthermore, about a third of the world's population lives in areas affected by water stress, and the demand for water is increasing. Investments in water infrastructure are lagging far behind in developing countries, especially in Africa, making them vulnerable to droughts and floods, with dramatic social, environmental and economic impacts. Access to water and sanitation is a particularly acute problem in the urban environment, where rapid population growth in cities in the developing world is putting additional pressure on infrastructure and services.

The EU is fully aware of the fundamental importance of access to water and sanitation, both from the human rights perspective and as a key development issue. The EU will further prioritize sustainable water management in its future development policy.

The EU and its member States have a strong political commitment to and a close collaboration with African countries in the water sector. This was reflected in the African Union/EU Joint Strategy agreed in Libya in November last year. Last year, the EU also launched an MDG initiative which provides €1 billion for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and has a focus on water and sanitation.

Overall, we have recently witnessed a reinforced commitment from the EU and its member States to water in recognition of the challenges related to climate change and the need for green growth. Furthermore, Germany and France will host, respectively, a conference on the water-energy-food nexus, to be held in Bonn in November 2011, and the World Water Forum in Marseille, in March 2012.

The EU also welcomes the efforts being led by the World Health Organization and UNICEF to look at the post-2015 development framework for water and sanitation, and we acknowledge the importance of the

global monitoring of the quality, affordability and accessibility of water and sanitation services.

To conclude, let me point out that the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), to be held in June 2012, offers a unique opportunity for the world to secure a renewed political commitment for sustainable development.

The EU and its member States are determined to contribute to making the Rio+20 Conference a success. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation and the sustainable management of water resources should figure prominently in the Rio+20 Conference and its outcome. This should complement and support our efforts to secure the full realization of the MDGs and the promotion of sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): Brazil welcomes this opportunity to discuss challenges to the full realization of the right to drinking water and sanitation, at the initiative of Bolivia. It is a pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. We listened very carefully and with great interest to his statement, and we echo his call for greater cooperation, action and solidarity in connection with this very important issue. I should like also to thank Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, and I commend her for her outstanding work.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a precondition for poverty eradication. Our efforts to develop our societies are closely linked to progress in this area. At the national level, Brazil is working to ensure universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Internationally, we have shared our experience and have learned from others in the management of water resources, in particular in arid and semi-arid areas.

Brazil recognizes the right to access to drinking water and sanitation as intrinsically related to respect for the rights to life, physical integrity, health, food and adequate housing. As with rights in the social and economic field, it is the responsibility of the State to guarantee the full enjoyment of those rights for their citizens. Respect for this right is fully compatible with the principle of the sovereign right of States to make use of their own water resources, as enshrined in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

In deepening our consideration of the challenges that implementing the right to drinking water and sanitation presents, we must recognize the central role of the human rights entities of the United Nations. Brazil firmly supports the efforts of the Special Rapporteur to clarify the nature and content of the obligations associated with the right to water and sanitation. In this regard, we look forward to considering, through her report to the sixty-sixth session, the challenges related to the achievement of this right.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held next year, will offer another opportunity to return to the subject of access to water and sanitation in the context of sustainable development. We hope to work intensively with all Member States to achieve meaningful results in this area that can lead to realization of the right to drinking water and sanitation.

Mr. Fernández-Arias Minuesa (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to welcome this debate on the human right to drinking water and sanitation and its impact on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a year after the adoption of resolution 64/292 on the recognition of the right to water and sanitation.

The resolution reminds us that this right is already recognized in international law and thus legally binding. Spain commends the fact that all our synergies are focused today on implementing this right, as reflected in resolutions 15/9 and 16/2 of the Human Rights Council. The latter is particularly relevant, since it renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. The work of the Special Rapporteur and former Independent Expert, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, has made it possible to lay the foundations for recognition of access to drinking water and sanitation today. I would like to express Spain's gratitude for the commendable work of the Special Rapporteur, who is here today, which has given us a solid working base from which to implement this right as a human right.

The recognition of the right to water must be considered from the human rights perspective. While international cooperative efforts have helped to mitigate the situation, it can be improved only if

tackled from this perspective. It was exactly this conviction that moved Spain, together with Germany, to take the initiative five years ago of considering the human right to drinking water and sanitation in the Human Rights Council in Geneva. My country recognizes the universality of all human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social or cultural. Moreover, we believe that there is a direct link between respect for all human rights and the achievement of the MDGs, as the Special Rapporteur indicated in her statement today.

I wish to highlight her recommendation that States need to understand how to fully realize the human right to water and sanitation by drawing up national action plans that must be integrated into poverty reduction strategies and national budgets. It is not acceptable that nearly 900 million people lack drinking water and that more than 2.5 billion have no access to basic sanitation.

Today, States and other actors involved understand exactly what their human rights obligations are in this area. The current challenge, therefore, is in their effective implementation and achievement. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of identifying best practices, as the Special Rapporteur did. The criteria for best practices in water and sanitation include the identification of standards based on human rights norms, as well as shared criteria based on such principles as non-discrimination, participation, responsibility, impact and, of course, sustainability. These criteria must be taken into account while ensuring that the right to drinking water and sanitation is being effectively implemented.

Spain was among the 122 States that voted in favour of the resolution on this issue presented to the Assembly by the Plurinational State of Bolivia exactly one year ago. We therefore welcome today's debate and the presence of Special Rapporteur Catarina de Albuquerque, who has contributed so much to the issue. Spain believes that a great deal of work has been done that we can support in order to further the full realization of this right as effectively as possible.

Mr. Gutiérrez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to thank you for taking the initiative of convening Member States for this event in order to enable us to reflect together on a subject that requires commitment on the part of every Government worldwide to ensuring the due realization of the human right to water. On behalf of my delegation and the State of Peru, I would also like to welcome the presence here of His Excellency the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Mr. Evo Morales Ayma.

International human rights norms include specific obligations regarding access to drinking water. They require States to guarantee access for all to sufficient drinking water for personal and domestic use, which includes consumption, sanitation, washing clothes, preparing food and personal and domestic hygiene. These norms also require States to continue progressively to ensure improved access to adequate sanitation services as a prerequisite for human dignity and private life, and to protect the quality of drinking water supplies and resources.

In the view of Peru, water is a renewable natural resource, essential to life and a strategic part of sustainable development and the maintenance of the systems and natural cycles that sustain it, as well as being essential to our nation's security. Through our legislation, it is endowed with sociocultural, economic and environmental value and must therefore be exploited through integrated management that balances all those values. We consider water to be an integral part of our ecosystems and a resource that is renewed by the hydrological cycle. In that context, Peru believes that the use and integrated management of water resources must take the following principles into consideration.

The first of these is the valuation of water and its integrated management. Second, access to water must be prioritized. Third, the public should participate in making decisions that affect the quality, quantity and availability of water, and any other water-related issues. Fourth, investments in water — be they public, private or a combination of the two — must be legally secured. Fifth, the water rights of peasant and indigenous communities must be respected. Sixth, water resources must be used and conserved in a sustainable way. Seventh, water resource management should be decentralized. Finally, efficiency in water use and conservation must be a priority.

With the adoption of resolution 64/292 a year ago, the international community took a significant step forward in raising awareness of the importance of guaranteed access to water, especially to those for whom it is scarce. Peru played an active role

throughout the process of identifying the obligations surrounding the right to drinking water and sanitation, with a view to its ultimate recognition as a human right. We participated in the consultations that were held first in Geneva and then in New York, and that led to the resolution's adoption. Peru supported that adoption in keeping with the principles I enumerated earlier, which are based on our domestic legislation and on the assumption that the guarantee of that human right must be subject to the local management, planning and adequate allocation of resources necessary to full enjoyment of that right. In other words, in realizing that right, administrations must adopt a comprehensive approach that recognizes the multidimensional impact of the human right to water.

Much remains to be done for States to implement this right, beginning with their full understanding of its implications in line with national laws and priorities. Peru reaffirms that the human right to water and sanitation derives from the right to an adequate standard of living and is inextricably linked to the highest attainable level of physical and mental health, and to the right to life and human dignity. In that vein, we assert our adherence to those principles and renew our promise to keep working to ensure that they become an increasingly palpable reality.

Mr. Barton (United States of America): The United States is deeply committed to finding solutions to our world's water challenges. In the United States Strategy for Meeting the Millennium Development Goals, released in September 2010, we welcomed progress, recognizing that over 1.6 billion people gained access to improved sources of drinking water between 1990 and 2005. At the same time, the United States expressed its concern that in many countries, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation remains unacceptably high.

At the September 2010 session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the United States joined consensus on resolution 15/9, which affirms

> "that the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" (*A/HRC/RES/15/9, para. 3*).

Both tenets are drawn from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and they call upon Governments to take steps towards the progressive realization of this human right. At the Human Rights Council in March, the United States supported the renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on this issue.

In the context of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, we believe the following. First, Governments should strive to progressively realize universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation and should seek to expand access, especially for underserved populations. Governments should develop and implement national policies and strategies, where needed, and commit sufficient budgetary resources so that they will be able to advance this goal as quickly as possible.

Secondly, Governments have an obligation to ensure that access to safe drinking water and sanitation services is provided on a non-discriminatory basis. Governments also have obligations to provide or ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation to persons in their custody.

Thirdly, the right to safe drinking water and sanitation can reasonably be interpreted to include access to cooking water. It can also be reasonably understood to mean water in sufficient quantity and quality — although not necessarily potable quality — to meet basic needs regarding personal hygiene.

Finally, in support of all of that, Governments should work towards greater transparency and accountability in water and sanitation service provision, and include the public in Government decision-making. Good governance is fundamental to the achievement of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

In this regard, we would like to recognize and applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation and its commitment to implementing water and sanitation initiatives through its "Sustainable sanitation — five-year drive to 2015" initiative, which targets decision-makers in an effort to build political will for water and sanitation programmes.

The United States hopes that this plenary meeting, aimed at providing dialogue, will also lead Governments to take concrete action to reduce the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Mr. Bonne (France) (*spoke in French*): France aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. I would like to thank the Bolivian Mission for the initiative to convene this meeting. My country welcomed the adoption of resolution 64/292, whereby the General Assembly recognized the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. It has enabled us over the past year to intensify mobilization of Governments and others on this issue. Following that historic step forward, the Human Rights Council adopted by consensus its resolution 15/9 of 30 September 2010, which links the basic right to water to the right to an adequate standard of living.

With the full involvement of all stakeholders on the issue of safe drinking water and sanitation, we need to move forward by implementing those resolutions and making the right of all to safe drinking water and sanitation a reality. In that spirit, France is committed, in the framework of an open, informal and trans-regional group of States — the Blue Group — to promoting the right to drinking water and sanitation and to working for its implementation. In that regard, we commend the excellent analysis, assessment and advocacy efforts of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Other praiseworthy initiatives seek to raise awareness of these new texts and the commitments they entail, and seek to work for their implementation. I especially welcome the Secretary-General's initiative on sanitation.

France welcomes the work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in the context of its Protocol on Water and Health, particularly the preparations under way for a handbook on good practices for equitable access to water. We also thank the many countries that supported our introduction of World Health Assembly resolution 64/24, enabling its adoption by consensus. That resolution calls on States members of the World Health Organization and the United Nations generally, as well as other stakeholders, to ensure enhanced integration of water, sanitation and public health policies with a view to achieving full realization of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

My country will host the sixth World Water Forum in Marseille from 12 to 17 March 2012. The right to drinking water and sanitation is a priority of France's international activities, and the Forum will be an opportunity to step up our mobilization in this area. We must recall the prime responsibility of States in creating an adequate organizational framework for realizing that right and mechanisms for monitoring its enforcement. We attach particular importance to delineating the respective roles of the various stakeholders.

Convinced that only joint action at the various levels of political decision-making will enable significant steps forward adapted to each individual context, we call for greater recognition of the role of local authorities in delivering State services in the context of national laws and regulations. All public stakeholders concerned must mobilize and commit to implementing cooperative solutions that will guarantee effective and equitable access to drinking water for all.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express Egypt's appreciation for the convening of this meeting to discuss the challenges of realizing the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. We welcome His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and thank him for his initiative to call for this debate, which is supported by a number of Member States, and for his preparations for this meeting.

The General Assembly adopted the important resolution 64/292 at its sixty-fourth session, recognizing the human right to safe and clean water and sanitation and supporting international efforts towards the full realization of all human rights. Egypt reaffirms that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and must be enjoyed on an equal basis and in an integrated manner. It stresses the importance for Member States to take all necessary measures at the national level to ensure the fulfilment of the requirements to achieve human rights for all, in accordance with international humanitarian law and obligations under international treaties.

In this context, Egypt believes that it is necessary to work towards addressing all the challenges faced by our peoples, especially in developing countries, in ensuring access to clean drinking water and sanitation, taking into account national and regional particularities, while adhering to the terms of international and regional treaties on international watercourses and transboundary water resources, and avoiding the identification of sub-categories of human

rights that differ from those stipulated in internationally agreed human rights instruments.

The outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting to review the progress made on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (resolution 65/1) reaffirmed our commitment to reducing the number of people lacking access to clean drinking water and sanitation by 50 per cent. Although several international reports indicate the possibility of achieving this goal by 2015, Egypt believes that several challenges could hinder the fulfilment of this commitment, the biggest of which is obtaining the funding for the implementation of relevant national programmes, which is estimated at $11.2 billion annually.

In addition, we need to redouble our efforts to address the negative consequences of climate change; achieve sustainable development, especially economic and social development; control population growth; and strengthen international cooperation in the field of technology transfer, scientific research and development, particularly in the field of drinking water and sanitation.

In this context, several years ago the Government of Egypt adopted an integrated national plan in the field of water resources in a manner that supports good governance, in order to ensure the equitable and fair distribution of clean drinking water and the provision of sanitation services to its people, without prejudice to the environment. The implementation of this plan is based on decentralization, with the full cooperation of concerned ministries and national agencies, in order to improve the efficiency of water use to sustain good health; combat the negative consequences of climate change; support the role of national water boards and the participation of the private sector in managing the water sector; continuously update and exchange data and information among the relevant national entities; coordinate national investments; and rationalize water usage, giving a bigger role to women in this regard.

Realizing the goal of providing access to clean drinking water and sanitation for all the peoples of the world will require the adoption of a comprehensive and integrated international approach based on several main pillars, the most important of which are addressing the challenges posed by climate change; promoting international cooperation in the field of water technology; providing the needed financial resources and official development assistance to support national programmes and policies for the provision of clean drinking water and sanitation; supporting sustainable development programmes, especially in relevant countries; and developing technologies that prevent pollution.

In this context, the United Nations and the international community must intensify their joint endeavours to develop integrated studies in order to address the major challenges hindering the realization of the right of the peoples of the world to clean drinking water and sanitation, taking into account the different challenges posed by the circumstances and particularities of each Member State.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba welcomes the participation in this debate of our dear comrade, President Evo Morales Ayma of the brotherly Plurinational State of Bolivia. Of course, we fully support his statement and thank him for his personal leadership and that of his country on matters of the greatest importance to the international community, such as that under consideration by the Assembly today.

Water is at the very heart of the survival of humankind. As was wisely affirmed by President Morales Ayma, water is life. Resolution 64/292 on the human right to water and sanitation, adopted a year ago upon the initiative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was a milestone. For the first time, the United Nations recognized the right to drinking water and sanitation as a fundamental human right.

As we speechify in this Hall, more than 884 million people on this planet are without access to sources of drinking water, and 2.6 billion people, almost 1 billion of them children, are without access to basic sanitation. We cannot passively accept the fact that each year more 3.5 million people die of diseases borne by polluted water, and that one out of every eight people in the world are without drinking water. Unless we act rapidly and effectively, more than 3 billion will suffer water shortages by 2025.

Most people on this planet live in developing countries where the main use of water is for agriculture. Hence, a shortage of water due, inter alia, to climate change means that agriculture, aquaculture and other forms of food production will be seriously affected, worsening the already parlous food security of developing countries.

International cooperation must be enhanced, and financial funds and mechanisms that are not subject to the discriminatory dictates and conditionalities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund need to be created. These international funds, whether or not they are sponsored by the United Nations, must provide tangible financial and technological resources to extend the coverage of drinking water, sanitation, agricultural and aquacultural production, integrated water production and the sustainable management of ecosystems.

In 1995, Cuba achieved the Millennium Development Goal on access to drinking water and sanitation and believes that access to water is a fundamental human right. In our country, the State is responsible for the management and control of water and sanitation. We have taken many measures to guarantee the human right to water. Allow me to mention just a few.

We have improved the supply and quality of water, increasing its rational use. We have reduced by 30 per cent the volume of water used in production-related processes. We have achieved annual decreases in the morbidity rate associated with waterborne diseases. We have supplied drinking water to more than 96 per cent of the population. We have increased the coverage, chlorination levels and quality of drinking water. We have developed early warning systems for drought.

Despite this progress, and as is the case for other developing countries, Cuba faces varied challenges with respect to climate change, natural disasters and water shortages.

The criminal economic, financial and trade blockade imposed by the United States Government on Cuba for over half a century has entailed considerable limitations and obstacles to access to new technology, water industry products and their benefits, as well as to achieving increased professional training in these areas.

Cuba does not support plans to privatize water or market mechanisms promoted by multinational corporations as an alleged solution to shortages of natural resources, including water. Equitable access to water and sanitation, without discrimination and in sufficient quantities, is a fundamental right and must not be manipulated as yet another opportunity to make a profit. The United Nations must be the principal forum in which to debate this issue and achieve agreements on it.

Mr. Askarov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Today's debate on water and the main challenges in realizing the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and their impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gives us an opportunity to discuss this very important topic.

On 20 July, the Security Council discussed the impact of climate change on security (see S/PV.6587) in the broader sense of the term. In many statements made on that occasion, direct allusion was made to the fact that water shortages are one of the main challenges to many regions of our planet.

Today, nobody disputes the incontrovertible truth that our planet, with each passing year, is unfortunately experiencing increasing numbers of natural catastrophes and the impact of climate change. Over the past year, we have seen earthquakes of unprecedented destructive force in Haiti, Japan, Chile and New Zealand. We have seen floods in Pakistan and Australia. We have seen severe droughts in the United States, China and the Horn of Africa.

In Central Asia, we are also seeing alarming symptoms of these phenomena. The glaciers of the Pamir and Tian Shan mountains, which are the main sources for the Amu Darya and Sir Darya rivers, are melting. This year, our region experienced an extremely severe drought, which affected the socioeconomic development of the countries of the region, including the achievement of the MDGs. We have seen reduced food production, degradation of the environment and other negative consequences of ecological crises.

Allow me to provide just one example. What was once the fourth-largest continental body of water in the world, the Aral Sea, has disappeared and has turned into the Aralkum — a gigantic desert. In that regard, the rational and reasonable use of water and energy resources is one of the main challenges facing Central Asia. Haphazard and ambiguous approaches to this challenge will only lead to a worsening of ecological disasters.

Today in the Aral region, we are experiencing not just ecological but also socioeconomic and demographic problems with global consequences, as

the Secretary-General saw with his own eyes during his visit to the Aral region in April 2010.

I would like to note that we in Uzbekistan are implementing a series of programmes for rationalizing water use and making it more efficient. In the context of agricultural reform, we have set up water users' associations. We have reduced the land area dedicated to cotton growing, which now accounts for only 25 per cent of our arable land. Despite the intensive economic development of our country, we are reducing our water intake from rivers. We have spent over $1 billion on restoring our soil over the past few years. As a result, we have now increased our arable land by 740,000 hectares.

Despite all this, it must be acknowledged that 3 million of our people do not have access to clean drinking water. Uzbekistan has almost 50 per cent of the entire population of the Central Asian region and has endured the brunt of the Aral disaster. We feel that we have the moral right to call for coordinated efforts on the part of States of the region to ensure a rational and reasonable use of water resources. Furthermore, Central Asia must fully implement the United Nations conventions on water and joint water use, including the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes of 17 March 1992 and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 21 May 1997. Both documents clearly stipulate that all decisions on the use of transboundary watercourses, including the construction of hydroelectric power stations, must in no way harm the environment and or the interests of neighbouring countries.

Guided by these generally accepted international legal principles and norms, Uzbekistan categorically opposes any construction of large hydroelectric power stations in the high reaches of the rivers of Central Asia that does not take into account the interests of the countries in the lower regions of the rivers. As stated by our President at the MDG summit in September 2010,

> "any attempt to implement projects drafted 30 to 40 years ago in the Soviet period to build large-scale hydropower facilities upstream, including enormous dams — plans that do not take into account the seismicity of the area, which the proposed construction could raise by eight to nine points — could inflict irreparable damage on the environment and create a very dangerous man-made catastrophe" (*A/65/PV.3, p. 15*).

The International Commission on Large Dams, which Uzbekistan joined last year, has said in its research that major dams built on transboundary watercourses can entail great risks in many respects.

In 2008, the United Nations began raising the alarm on increasing food shortages. Climate change and water shortages are undermining food production and even endangering lives. Without secure water supplies, we cannot talk about security, stability or the human right to life. As is stated in the basic text of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations — and Uzbekistan fully agrees — fresh water should be used primarily for the production of food. This is particularly relevant for Central Asia, where every State must be rational and responsible in its use of water resources, on which the life and security of every country, the entire region and every human being depend.

Mr. Berger (Germany): Germany fully aligns itself with the statement made by Permanent Observer of the European Union.

Let me start by thanking the Presidents of the General Assembly and of Bolivia for convening this important plenary meeting on the human right to water and sanitation. We are particularly honoured today by the presence of His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. The debate today gives us an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved and, more important, on the challenges ahead.

The past 12 months have witnessed the recognition, first in the General Assembly and then in the Human Rights Council in Geneva, of the human right to water and sanitation that is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living at the United Nations. That breakthrough is the result of years of engagement of interested national Governments, civil society organizations around the globe, national human rights institutions and experts at the international and national levels.

Germany is proud to have been part and parcel of the process right from the beginning. In 2008, Germany and Spain launched an initiative in the

Human Rights Council to create the mandate of the then Independent Expert on the question. We have witnessed growing support for our initiative, which in 2011 led to the creation by the Human Rights Council of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. That important step forward would not have been possible without the crucial support of many like-minded Member States from all regional groups.

The great challenge now is to implement the decisions that we collectively took. Talking about the human right to water and sanitation, we cannot but reiterate the necessity to think in broader terms than simply technical feasibility questions. We must use a human rights approach if we want to create sustainable solutions. The questions of safety, quality, sufficiency, availability, the physical and economic accessibility and the affordability of water and sanitation must receive adequate attention when we create solutions for those in need. Ignoring such parameters means ignoring the real needs of those who are the bearers of such human rights.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We should also take into account that there is no one size fits all when it comes to implementation in individual country situations. However, the common denominator remains the same — the realization of the right to safe water and sanitation. In that regard, we look forward to discussing the compendium of best practices that will be presented by the Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council in September. In that context, and taking into account the link between human rights and the Millennium Development Goals, highlighted also today by the Secretary-General, we are particularly pleased by the fact that the World Health Organization/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for the Water and Sanitation Sector has adapted and aligned its criteria regarding access to water and sanitation to those defined by the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Before I close, I would like to encourage like-minded Member States of all regions of the world to engage in the promotion and implementation of the human right to water and sanitation and to make sure that a human rights approach is maintained when discussing national solutions and designing national action plans.

Mr. García González (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We commend the initiative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the leadership of President Evo Morales and of the President of the General Assembly to convene this plenary debate on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Water is the basis of all forms of life. It is vital to human beings, animals and the environment. Access to drinking water and sanitation is necessary for a dignified life. Many human rights cannot be enjoyed without water. Hence, water is very important for well-being and social development. In fact, all great civilizations have always developed close to large water supplies.

Access to drinking water is a fundamental human right that the Government of El Salvador fully supports and that currently is jeopardized principally by two major factors that affect that vital liquid: shortage and pollution. According to research, one-fifth of the world population does not have access to sources of safe water. Every day, 6,000 people, most of them children, die because of polluted water.

The level of access to water and sanitation supply services in El Salvador remains low, in particular in rural areas. However, under the current Administration of President Mauricio Funes Cartagena, a series of projects is being developed in various areas to improve the supply and quality of the vital fluid in the country. The sustainable and comprehensive management of water is seen by the Government of our country as a participatory process aimed at achieving the internationally agreed goals of protection, conservation, defence and prevention regarding the quality and availability of clean water in order to ensure the right of access for the entire population and future generations through efficient coordination of public policies.

On 28 July 2010, El Salvador joined a large group of sponsors in adopting resolution 64/292, entitled "The human right to water and sanitation", in the plenary of the General Assembly. That was certainly an important step in international efforts to promote sustainable human development.

However, in order to effectively implement that declaration of water as a human right, in practice it

must go hand in hand with a series of measures to prevent the waste, pollution and financial exploitation of water. Water is increasingly becoming the key element in numerous conflicts that may result in social violence.

Access to drinking water and sanitation as a human right must be fair, non-discriminatory, adequate in terms of quantity and quality, economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, and affordable. It is therefore the duty of the State to protect people from being disconnected from water services and from pollution and to prevent violation of the rights of others by individuals or companies.

We cannot ignore the role of forests in the conservation of water. When large areas of forest are destroyed, that has a negative impact on the entire water system, leading to a drop in the availability and quality of the water. It is equally important to regulate activities connected to mining, oil prospecting and industrial agriculture, which are direct sources of water pollution.

We are all responsible for ensuring that everyone, in particular the most needy and excluded groups, can enjoy their basic needs and access to drinking water and sanitation. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals should help to meet such needs. However, much remains to be done until everyone can exercise their full right to water and sanitation. In our delegation's opinion, the issue should be a significant part of the discussions on the substantive content of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

To conclude, the Government of El Salvador shares the view that States should implement measures for a more rational use of that resource.

Ms. Burgstaller (Sweden): Sweden fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Sweden welcomes the convening of today's plenary discussion on the right to water and sanitation. Access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is absolutely central for human life, health and dignity. The right to water and sanitation is now recognized the world over as a human right, derived from the rights to health and to an adequate standard of living in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and confirmed by decisions taken by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

In light of this, Sweden welcomed the consensus adoption of a resolution in the Human Rights Council in March this year that established the post of Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. We commend the Special Rapporteur for her excellent work, and we thank her for her presentation here today.

States must now ensure that everyone has access to safe drinking water for basic personal use and that water supply is organized in a non-discriminatory way. The efficient, fair and sustainable management of water resources is an important prerequisite for sustainable development, inclusive economic growth and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The upcoming 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development offers a strategic opportunity for all of us to further address the challenge of improving water resource management at all levels, and to make safe water and basic sanitation accessible to all, in particular to women, who often play a central role in securing the water supply at the local level and for households needs.

Up to now, the work that has been done in the Human Rights Council and other United Nations human rights bodies has helped us define the obligation of States in relation to the right to water and sanitation, and has given us a strong basis for the work that lies ahead — respecting and implementing this recently recognized right on the ground to make it a reality for everyone.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): At the outset, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines warmly welcomes His Excellency Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. We are grateful for his personal involvement and for Bolivia's championing of this worthy initiative.

Last year, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was an enthusiastic sponsor of resolution 64/292, in which the General Assembly recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential to the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. Resolution 64/292 built upon previous resolutions of the Human Rights Council, and has subsequently been reinforced by Human Rights Council resolution 15/9, which strengthened the legal

framework surrounding the General Assembly's recognition of this critical human right.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has devoted tremendous resources to the achievement of the right to water and sanitation in recent years. In the past decade, we have increased access to pipe-borne water from 70 per cent to over 98 per cent through prudent infrastructural and organizational investments. We have markedly improved sanitation through the establishment of new water distribution systems, modern sewage treatment facilities, and vastly enhanced garbage collection and disposal.

Our modest national success in realizing and entrenching this human right has taught us that the right to water and sanitation is eminently achievable if the requisite resources and political will are present. The international community has often given voice to a political commitment to the achievement of this right, but too often we have left much of the hard work in this regard to heroic civil society organizations and small business-persons that lack the capacity to effect the sort of multisectoral change that is needed.

We must now act to operationalize the call of last year's resolution

> "to provide financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer, through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all" (*resolution 64/292, para. 2*).

Our ability to answer this call will be the standard upon which we will be judged by the 884 million people who lack access to safe drinking water and the 2.6 billion who do not have access to basic sanitation.

This meeting must also recognize the fragility of recent gains in developing countries like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the urgency of looming threats to the right to safe drinking water. Climate change and desertification threaten to undo recent progress in achieving the right to water, and will further stymie efforts to extend water and sanitation to the hundreds of millions who inexcusably live without these basic necessities.

Recent unseasonal droughts in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have forced the Government to transport drinking water by ship to other islands in our archipelago, and have affected our agricultural capacity and our ability to generate hydroelectricity. Sea-level rise is threatening the water tables in small island developing States, and may soon have a disastrous effect on access to drinking water, farming and livestock in those communities.

According to UN-Water, the number of States categorized as "water scarce" will increase by 50 per cent by 2025. This scarcity, and the tensions that it will inevitably engender, will have obvious security implications in the coming years.

In fulfilment of the right to water, development cooperation and increased resources are critical. Additionally, the international community must begin to mainstream the issue of water in the global political agenda, link climate change more closely to water access, and consider the true value of the water that is used, overused and wasted in many countries, particularly developed countries.

At the United Nations, there is no shortage of important and well-meaning resolutions and declarations on the topic of water and sanitation. We have General Assembly resolutions, Human Rights Council resolutions, and reports of independent experts and special rapporteurs. The Millennium Development Goals have established a target of halving by 2015 the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation — a target that unfortunately appears to be woefully out of reach.

Three years ago, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared 2008 the year of the bottom billion. For the nearly 1 billion who lack safe drinking water, the time for noble sentiments is long past. As we continue to casually flush our toilets, toss our half-consumed bottles of imported spring water into the trash and luxuriate in another long shower, let us resolve to act meaningfully for those who risk their lives and consume their days simply in search of a mouthful of unpolluted water.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I convey the warm regards of the people and Government of Nicaragua to President Evo Morales Ayma, and acknowledge and thank him for the leadership of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in the recognition of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life. From the outset, Nicaragua was a

proud supporter of this initiative, which culminated in the adoption of resolution 64/292.

The Government of Reconciliation and National Unity headed by Commandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra considers it essential that the human being be seen as the central focus of development, in full respect for the human rights of Nicaraguans, particularly in the implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights that enable them to enjoy a decent standard of living. In this regard, and considering that water and sanitation are vital to individual health and dignity, my Government has striven to invest in and draw up national plans for improving access to water and sanitation. Similarly, we are firmly opposed to the privatization efforts initiated under previous Governments. The human right to water, the life of human beings, can never be privatized.

There are 884 million people who still lack drinking water and 2.6 billion without basic sanitation. The insufficient and inadequate supply of drinking water is a persistent health issue worldwide. Eighty per cent of diseases in the developing world are the result of a lack of clean water and adequate sanitation, and thus one of the chief causes of sickness and death, particularly in children.

This grim picture should inspire Member States to continue to work together in the quest for full attainment of the human right to drinking water and sanitation. It should also inspire the international community to mobilize technical assistance and cooperation in support of national action plans and initiatives related to the provision of access to drinking water and sanitation. Achieving access to water and sanitation is essential to human development and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In that regard, water and sanitation have not been accorded the attention necessary to increase and sustain progress towards the attainment of an important part of the MDGs, to which they are closely linked.

What must be done is to plan and implement cooperation and development assistance efforts in accordance with human rights standards and principles, including the right to water and sanitation, as well as with human rights obligations relating to non-discrimination, among others, ensuring that adequate and effective measures are taken to identify and address any negative consequences for human rights.

Without sustainable management of water that takes all the needs of present and future generations into account, we run the growing risk of finding ourselves trapped, not only as concerns development and survival for many of the world's most dispossessed peoples, but also in situations that are a potential threat to international peace and security. Only the dawning awareness of our peoples that it is impossible to continue with unsustainable models of consumption and production will enable us to save Mother Earth and, eventually, all the human beings on our planet.

Mr. Andrianarivelo-Razafy (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to offer the Government of Madagascar's thanks to the President for organizing this important meeting, which will enable the States Members of the United Nations to discuss the crucial subject of the human right to water and sanitation.

One year after the General Assembly's adoption in July 2010 of its historic resolution 64/292 on the fundamental right to water and sanitation, the time has come to launch a genuine dialogue designed to map the road that leads directly to the full and effective implementation of that right, so essential to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and above all to identify the challenges and obstacles to which we must find lasting solutions. Along with all earlier decisions and actions, the resolution has contributed significantly to efforts to achieve our stated goal of halving the number of those lacking access to drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

Water is essential to human life. Madagascar believes that access to water and sanitation is a genuine basic right that should be respected without exception or discrimination. That being the case, every State and Government has the duty and obligation to ensure each of its citizens' full enjoyment of that right. With this vision as the guiding principle for its actions, the Government of Madagascar, which attaches great importance to the strategic challenges and issues related to drinking water in development and in combating poverty, put its commitments into practice at the highest level with its enactment in 1999 of a code of laws on water and its creation in 2008 of a Ministry of Water. The Ministry's mandate is to promote sustainable and supported development in Madagascar with an approach based on the MDGs, designed to ensure conditions for economic growth and the welfare of the Malagasy people, and to secure

access to drinking water and develop sanitation infrastructure.

Similarly, with the chief aim of preventing diseases linked to substandard living conditions, the Ministry of Health's sanitation service and engineering department has established a health and environment service. Various other ministerial departments, such as the ministries for land management and the environment, provide backup efforts in these areas. Our national sanitation policy and strategy, adopted in November 2008, strengthens the Government of Madagascar's legislative and regulatory framework. With the main aim of improving the effectiveness of sanitation and hygiene efforts throughout Madagascar, it is responsible for managing water resources, particularly in protecting water, conserving water resources, protecting the environment, making the best use of water resources, and supplying drinking water and sanitation for domestic waste water.

In order to deal with the omnipresent dangers of disease and other consequences of a lack of drinking water supplies and access to sanitation, we have been able to increase concrete action with the support of various partners and friends to Madagascar among nations, alongside the efforts of our Government. To cite just a few examples, the Diorano-WASH Madagascar initiative — a platform for dialogue and sharing experience that brings together Government bodies, national and international non-governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral technical and financial partners, regulated by a national Dioran WASH strategy and charter — has enabled us to make great progress in providing the population with drinking water and promulgating good hygiene and sanitary practices. Since 2007, we have also set up hundreds of basic health clinics within the WASH framework that practice an integrated water-sanitation-hygiene approach. We have added a sanitation and safe drinking water primary environment care programme to this initiative, for which we are seeking more partnership support.

Madagascar has deployed considerable efforts, but our country continues to face many challenges in terms of achieving the MDGs. Every year drought affects the southern part of the country, posing a continuing threat to thousands of people, especially children. In 2010, 43 per cent of the population had access to safe drinking water, and 48 per cent of households had access to sanitation. That is far from the goal that the Government has set itself, which is to achieve access to safe drinking water for 63 per cent of the population and to sanitation for 56 per cent by 2015.

Bearing in mind these challenges, which are exacerbated by myriad obstacles, including lack of financing; insufficient capacity in terms of human resources; lack of current data on requirements in the area of sanitation and hygiene; factors related to behaviour change, particularly in rural areas; and cultural factors, our Government is encouraging increased involvement on the part of non-governmental organizations and of civil society in activities relating to the organization, operation and management of water supply installations and sanitation facilities.

The Government of Madagascar calls for a greater mobilization of financial resources so as to enable all peoples of the world, particularly those in the developing countries and in Africa, to fully realize their basic rights to water and to sanitation. Our Government calls also on all Member States to effectively implement the commitments that they have undertaken to ensure that this right becomes reality and does not remain only theoretical.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to warmly thank the organizers of this meeting, Bolivia most of all, and to express our deep satisfaction at this welcome initiative.

In its resolution 64/292, the General Assembly stated that access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. This major advance, along with the proclamation of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015, definitively placed the issue of water and sanitation high on the agenda of the United Nations.

In that context, my country regularly reiterates its commitment and determination to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly Goal 7 — to reduce by half, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water or sanitation services.

That is why access to safe drinking water and to adequate sanitation services, which is a major challenge on the international development agenda, has high priority in terms of our national development policies. In the same vein, Senegal, for several

decades, has been implementing a water-supply policy aimed at providing a sufficient quantity and quality of water to various users at the lowest possible cost. That policy has led to an institutional and legislative reform that enhanced the effectiveness of the sector, with a particular focus on improved management and providing the most marginalized sectors of the population with access to water.

Moreover, this mechanism is buttressed by a dynamic private sector and the implementation of a plan of action for the integrated management of water resources. In addition to those efforts, another positive development has taken place: the establishment, in the framework of the Millennium Water and Sanitation Programme (PEPAM), of several hydraulic infrastructures, particularly in poor peri-urban zones and in rural areas. The implementation of the programme has already enabled us to achieve quite striking results. Despite these positive results, which are promising in terms of the achievement of the MDGs in this particular domain, much remains to be done in the area of water quality and delivery, as well as sanitation, especially in rural areas.

With a view to reducing inequalities in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation between urban and rural areas, we have undertaken activities aimed at harnessing surface and run-off water, particularly with respect to catchment areas.

We will not win this fight if we do not take account of climate-related phenomena such as droughts and floods, which can exacerbate constraints on water resources as well as the problem of access to water and sanitation. That is why I call for increased international cooperation and assistance, which are imperative necessities for supporting the activities of developing countries in the implementation of the objectives set in that respect.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate to Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, the readiness of the authorities of Senegal to welcome her to our country in the context of the visit she is planning to pay us soon.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): I wish at the outset to commend President Deiss for having facilitated the holding of this meeting at the initiative of Bolivia, joined by more than 20 States, including my own, with the aim of providing a dialogue on the principal challenges related to the realization of the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation and their impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, one year after the adoption of resolution 64/292, entitled "The human right to water and sanitation".

The presence at this meeting of His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, adds significance to our gathering here today and underscores the high-level political commitment to the issues of water and sanitation by placing them on the international agenda.

The timing of this meeting is also quite significant, as it is taking place against the backdrop of the current severe drought in the Horn of Africa region, which straddles Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, where more than 10 million people are facing severe starvation. It is unfortunate that, despite the early warnings issued and the appeals made over the past six months, the world has been slow to recognize the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe, where resources for clean water, food, shelter and health services have been acutely depleted.

We are only a few years away from the deadline for the commitments made by the international community to achieve fully the Millennium Development Goal of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water or access basic sanitation. Unless, therefore, there is sufficient goodwill on the part of the international community, it is inconceivable that that gap will be bridged, given that almost a billion people lack access to improved water sources and that more than 2.6 billion people do not have access to improved sanitation.

It is quite encouraging, however, that many countries are committing to recognizing access to water and sanitation as human rights and taking, with appropriate political will, both short- and long-term measures to fulfil these goals.

As with everything else, we cannot escape the reality that the world is divided into haves and have-nots when it comes to the full realization of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. But we need to bear in mind that we have an obligation. These differences must give way to rational and concrete political commitments to ensure access to safe drinking water

and sanitation for large parts of the population, irrespective of their station in life or where they live.

According to the Independent Expert on human rights, human rights prohibit discrimination against and the exclusion and deprivation of any group or individual, whether living in rural areas, in slums or in poverty. This is why the human rights framework places primary responsibility for the realization of human rights on the State, which should ensure the progressive achievement of universal access and create an overall enabling environment.

My country is one of the most deficient in freshwater resources, and we risk running out of water in the next 25 years. We are one of the countries with the least water available per capita. Out of the 186 countries reviewed for water stress, Djibouti is included among the 17 most at-risk countries in the world, described as being at "extreme risk". For us and other countries in similar situations, the changing patterns of climate change are expected to cause increased drought and flooding. The water shortage situation is predicted to become ever more intense.

With the growth of the world population, an increase in drinking water consumption is inevitable, and, taken together with increased and inefficient irrigation, corruption and poor resource management, the problems of water shortage will be exacerbated. While some water-deficit countries may be endowed with other resources to enable them to invest in desalination plants, build water reservoirs or secure food in other ways, most countries face real challenges for survival.

One year after the adoption of resolution 64/292 on safe drinking water and sanitation, it is gratifying to participate in this meeting to assess the progress achieved within the context of the Millennium Development Goals. We have indeed a long way to go to fully realize the right to drinking water and sanitation, but that prospect should not deter us from striving hard to enable the millions without drinking water or lacking acceptable sanitation conditions to enjoy their human rights.

Mr. Ngculu (South Africa): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting on the challenges with regard to the realization of the right of access to safe drinking water and sanitation in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

South Africa also wishes to commend the delegation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and in particular His Excellency President Evo Morales Ayma, for their efforts and commitment to ensuring the human right to water and sanitation.

The Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution provides a legislative framework for the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the human right to water and sanitation. In addition, the South African Constitution provides for the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights, which derives from the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, especially based on the progressive realization of these rights, including the right of access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

In this regard, our Government has an obligation to create the enabling environment necessary to ensure that all South Africans have access to acceptable levels of water and sanitation. Our Government has established dedicated programmes, policies, criteria and legislation to ensure the realization and enjoyment of the right of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and has committed itself to ensuring access to basic water services since 1994 by creating access to basic water and sanitation to previously disadvantaged people and the victims of racial discrimination.

The comprehensive nature of this right also touches upon other rights, such as the right to adequate housing and an adequate standard of living, and the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. The approach undertaken by the Government of South Africa when dealing with the issue of human settlement is not only about the four walls, but also includes the provision of access to basic services such as basic sanitation, health and water.

Water and environment are catalysts for South Africa's economic growth and development. The role of the Department of Water Affairs, which holds the national mandate on the human right to water and sanitation, is to ensure that the country has enough water and that the environment is protected in order to meet our country's development needs, including the MDGs.

The South African Cabinet further approved the Strategic Framework for Water Services in 2003 and committed itself to the following sanitation targets: all people in South Africa shall have access to a functional basic sanitation facility; all schools shall have adequate and safe water supply and sanitation services; all clinics shall have adequate and safe water supply and sanitation services; and all bucket toilets shall be eradicated.

South Africa actively works and collaborates with fellow African countries, under the auspices of the African Ministerial Council on Water, in the use and management of water resources for sustainable social and economic development and maintenance of African ecosystems. South Africa also uses the New Partnership for Africa's Development water and sanitation infrastructure programme and the Southern African Development Community water and sanitation programme to further realize the human right to water and sanitation for the African people. In response to the Millennium Development Goals pledge, South Africa has committed itself to implementing a dedicated water services programme. Considering that we are a water-scarce country, South Africa also placed itself at the forefront of progressive water resource management.

We are pleased to announce that South Africa has done well. In terms of achieving the MDG of formal basic water supply, we halved the formal backlog in 2005; and in terms of basic sanitation, the MDG was achieved in 2008. The achievements of the South African Government can be ascribed to specific strategic actions and strong political will and commitment. However, while we acknowledge that great strides have been made in bringing basic services such as water to poor households, many still do not have access to water or have insufficient access.

Important challenges with regard to the realization of the human right to water and sanitation are related to climate change, which is a reality that impacts a great number of people and represents a threat to South Africa's long-term sustainable development, economic growth, quality of life, migration and urbanization.

South Africa remains committed to ensuring that the right to access to water remains sacrosanct, and in this connection we join other delegations in calling on States and international organizations to provide financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all, for the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 7 and broader sustainable development goals.

Mr. Körösi (Hungary): Hungary fully aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union.

Much has been said already by previous speakers, and, obviously, there is a strong convergence among Member States on a broad spectrum of issues, and it encourages me to be very brief and to focus on some points and messages we deem particularly important.

Protection of water resources and integrated, sustainable water management, including sanitation, are key priorities for my country. We are committed to further sharing with our partners our experiences in these fields.

Hungary is of the view that a firm legal basis is of vital importance for successful water management and sanitation at both the national and international levels. Hungary encourages the reinforcement of the international partnership on all water-related issues, also in relation to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), to be held next year.

Access to clean drinking water and sanitation should be universal, but this is far from a reality today, as hundreds of millions of people around the world continue to suffer, having been deprived of what we deem essential to a decent human life. We believe that it is a right of all that needs to be protected. It requires investments in management institutions, policies and infrastructure throughout vulnerable areas. The devastating humanitarian, economic and social consequences will come at a much higher cost if we do not take preventive measures now.

Mr. Vigny (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The proclamation on 28 July 2010 by the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/292, of the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights was a historic step with respect to the issue of water

Switzerland actively participated in those negotiations and supported the resolution, while

highlighting the need for coordination between the work of the General Assembly and that of the Human Rights Council. The resolutions adopted by these two United Nations bodies bring new ethical and qualitative dimensions in terms of physical, economic and non-discriminatory access to services of acceptable quality. Switzerland firmly believes that, in view of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the new goals we need to define for the period following 2015, a human rights-based approach is of the essence.

With that in mind, we welcome the report (A/65/254) submitted by the independent expert, during the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, on the importance of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation to the realization of the MDGs, particularly Goal 7.C, which seeks to halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population with no access to safe drinking water or basic sanitation services. The benchmarks of the World Health Organization/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, put in place to monitor the achievement of the MDGs related to water and sanitation, must now incorporate these new dimensions.

Switzerland, along with several other countries, supports the Joint Monitoring Programme in this task, which will enable us to monitor the progress made in the area of access to water and sanitation from a human rights perspective. The current situation as described by the Programme reveals major inequalities in terms of access to water and a massive shortfall as concerns sanitation. There is a very wide gap between the needs in the field and the financial resources available. The situation calls for increased financing for drinking water and sanitation by and for low-income countries.

The Water and Sanitation for All Task Force, supported by numerous partners, including Switzerland, seeks to promote dialogue and commitments with respect to this issue at the global level.

At the beginning of this year, the Swiss Parliament agreed to increase our official development assistance. The increase will be devoted primarily to water. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation decided to support the establishment and joint financing of a consortium of Swiss non-governmental organizations that will focus on countries where water and sanitation coverage is extremely sparse, notably in vulnerable countries.

The progress made in terms of recognizing the right to water must be translated into concrete solutions that must be adjusted to scale. That will be a key topic at the forthcoming World Water Forum, to be held in 2012, and will also lie at the heart of the work of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, whom I thank for her very detailed, specific and meaningful statement.

The Protocol on Water and Health, ratified and supported by Switzerland, is a good example of a concrete solution. This international instrument, which pertains to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, enshrines the close link that exists between human rights, health, protection of the environment and sustainable development.

In that context, the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency and its partners are in the process of elaborating guidelines aimed at taking better account of the various dimensions of the right to water in the framework of projects related to safe drinking water sanitation and to the integrated management of water resources.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I would like first of all to thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this important dialogue, and, of course, the Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteur for their comments earlier today. I would also like to thank President Evo Morales and the Plurinational State of Bolivia for having brought this life-sustaining, indeed, life-creating, human need before the General Assembly.

Australians understand something about water. We are the driest inhabited continent on Earth. We have one of the lowest rainfalls, and about three quarters of our land — and there is a lot of it — is arid or semi-arid. Over the past decade we have experienced what scientists estimate to have been our worst drought in 1,000 years.

But of course Australia is a wealthy country, and a developed country; our geology and climate, however, are tough, and our citizens are accustomed to water restrictions in all our major cities as a result of climate change, drought and the degradation of our waterways. Of course, as a developed country that is wealthy, we suffer nothing like the magnitude of the

problem so eloquently defined a few minutes ago by the Permanent Representative of Djibouti.

But we do hope that, as a nation, we understand the importance of water to survival and people's livelihoods and the imperative of water and sanitation to people's health, the sustainability of communities — particularly remote and indigenous communities — and the environment. We recognize that access to water and sanitation is fundamental to the realization of human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Other speakers today have spoken eloquently about the figures we confront — more than 2 billion people with no access to basic sanitation — due, in part, to water scarcity but also due, in part, to poor policies and management that have failed to ensure that everyone, regardless of who they are and where they live, can gain access to safe, affordable water and sanitation supplies and services.

The implications for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are clear; we simply cannot attain the MDGs without providing safe water and effective sanitation. Australia is encouraged that the world is on track to meet the MDG 7 target to deliver safe drinking water to hundreds of millions of people, but we are alarmed that the sanitation target is likely to be missed by 1 billion. We must do better.

My own Government has invested over $330 million in water, sanitation and hygiene in developing countries in the past two years, and we are planning to spend another $1 billion in the next four to do much more. Our non-governmental organizations also give priority to water.

Variable rainfall patterns, pollution of water supplies, inefficient use and leakage of water supplies, poor infrastructure, high population growth, rapid urbanization, discrimination and marginalization are all big challenges, which others have spoken about today, to achieving the goal of delivering safe drinking water and sanitation. Addressing those challenges requires enhanced policy and management, increased investments through funding and capacity support, the application of innovative and cost-effective sanitation and water technologies, and an improved focus on the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized.

We need to improve water and sanitation planning for urban settings and close the gap in the level of access between urban and rural populations. We need to expand rainwater catchment and storage facilities to communities in need, particularly, as I have said, to remote and indigenous communities. We need to empower local communities to enact their own local water and sanitation initiatives.

We need to do more to support integrated water resource management, including safe waste disposal and water-sharing arrangements. And without delay, we need to address the disproportionate impact that poor water and sanitation access has on health, education and economic opportunities for women, young girls and people with disabilities.

To conclude, Australians know that water is a precious resource — the life source — and that it must be carefully managed. We ourselves will continue to give what priority and assistance we can to help meet the challenges that impede access to safe drinking water and sanitation for many hundreds of millions of people. We will continue to participate in vital debates, such as today's, and we would encourage the General Assembly to keep this vital subject on its agenda.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia for having called for this meeting and President Deiss for rallying to the very just cause of the fundamental right to water and sanitation.

Access to drinking water and sanitation is today a basic human right, as all speakers here have stated. Alas, in today's world, more than 884 million people still lack access to drinking water, while 2.5 billion still lack access to appropriate sanitation facilities, according to a report prepared in 2008 by the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization.

Bearing this situation in mind, the Government of Burkina Faso has set up a State-owned company — the National Water and Sanitation Office — tasked with building, managing and protecting facilities for capturing, transferring, treating and delivering drinking water to meet urban and industrial needs. It also builds, promotes, improves and manages collective, individual and autonomous sanitation facilities for the evacuation of waste water and solid waste in urban and semi-urban areas.

Notable progress made by my country over the past few years in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation led to our being honoured with a Millennium Development Goals Award in September 2010. We would like once again to thank the partners whose support for our Government enabled it to achieve these results.

However, Burkina Faso's efforts to manage water have been limited by rainfall that is inadequate and very unequal across the national territory. This situation led us, in cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco, in 1998 to launch Operation SAGA, which aims to create artificial rainfall using proven techniques. The experiment was quite successful and is now an ongoing programme.

As a Sahelian country that has suffered from drought, Burkina Faso takes this opportunity to alert the international community to the expansion of the desert and its nefarious consequences. The current dramatic and even tragic situation in the Horn of Africa, and Somalia in particular, gives some idea of those consequences.

We hope that the high-level meeting scheduled for 20 September, on the theme "Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication", will be an opportunity for us to address the core of the problem and, in particular, the matter of access to drinking water and appropriate sanitation facilities.

Lack of access to water and sanitation has serious consequences for education, housing, work, gender parity and life in general. It is thus very urgent to identify appropriate and sustainable solutions to this problem, whose causes and consequences are many and complex. Nevertheless, through concerted and inclusive efforts, the Member States, with the assistance of the United Nations system and other stakeholders, will be able to create, in our opinion, the conditions conducive to guaranteeing access to safe drinking water and sanitation to populations that still lack them.

Ms. Hussain (Maldives): The Maldives welcomes the convening of this very important debate on the right to water and sanitation. We thank the President for his leadership in initiating this important discussion.

The Maldives has a policy towards ensuring that all inhabited islands have access to clean water. Water is very scarce and extremely expensive for us to manage due to the geological formation and geography of the Maldives archipelago. There are no rivers or streams. The few small wetlands or freshwater lakes that we have yet to be managed. Our main freshwater resource is groundwater in the form of a thin freshwater lens found in very shallow depths. It is therefore highly susceptible to saline intrusion and contamination due to sanitation processes and needs intensive management, which is often extremely involved and expensive, to avoid overexploitation. Our lesson is that the health benefits and social impacts of this effort far outweigh the expense.

The Maldives is deeply concerned that, according to the 2010 Joint Monitoring Programme report of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, approximately 884 million people lack access to improved water sources and that over 2.6 billion people do not have access to sanitation. We are very alarmed that approximately 1.5 million children under the age of five die and that 443 million school days are lost every day as a result of water- and sanitation-related diseases. Urgent and transformational action is needed now to combat these global issues.

There is no doubt that water is a scarce commodity all over the globe. It is even more so for countries like the Maldives, which are highly vulnerable to climate change, adding further pressure to existing threats to the sustainability of our freshwater resources. For small island States like the Maldives, the impact of climate change on our water resources is not a distant reality but an acute problem that we are faced with in the present. Our commitment to contributing to resolve this most critical of issues is directly related to the well-being and socio-economic development of our people.

The Maldives welcomed the adoption of resolution 64/292 and Human Rights Council resolution 15/9, which recognize the human right to water and sanitation and reaffirm, inter alia, that the human right to water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably linked to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human dignity.

We reaffirm that the human right to water and sanitation is set out in existing human rights treaties and therefore entails legally binding obligations. The Maldives has long been engaged in taking measures to protect and ensure the right to water. Our national policy is to ensure that all inhabited islands have adequate water and sanitation services.

We acknowledge that right and have put plans in place to enhance the management of our water resources in order to combat the impact of climate change and sea-level rise. The Maldives believes that existing measures to ensure the right to water must be evaluated further in order to determine their sustainability in the context of sea-level rise, the increased frequency of extreme weather events and changes in precipitation levels.

We consider that the recognition of the human right to water and sanitation is a breakthrough that demonstrates the political will and determined aspiration of the international community's to resolve this important issue.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to thank the President of the General Assembly for having organized this important meeting on the critical issue of the right to water and sanitation, which is a major challenge to the international community. It is at the heart of the realization of the economic and social rights that Morocco holds dear. We are delighted to learn that Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque has been tasked to advocate this right, which she is doing with great commitment and professionalism.

We all know that the increasingly numerous calls for the recognition and realization of the right to water are legitimate and essential to the full and effective exercise of human rights. No life is possible or conceivable without access to water. This claim is not political, ideological or moral. It is a solemn appeal in favour of the right to life. By enshrining the right to water in international norms, are we not simply helping to protect life? Is that not the raison d'être of the United Nations system? Can we legitimately accept that millions of women, men and children, mostly in developing countries, are deprived of sufficient access to water for economic, geographic or environmental reasons? Is that our understanding of respect for human dignity? Is it acceptable that, in Africa and Asia, the average distance that a woman or a child must walk in order to find water is six kilometres?

I am proud of having personally experienced that trial and of having lived in very difficult circumstances. When I talk about the right to water, I know what I am talking about.

According to the World Health Organization, half of all hospital beds across the world are occupied by patients suffering from waterborne diseases. According to the United Nations Development Programme, the lack of access to drinking water and sanitation has grave consequences for the right to health. Every year, 1.8 million children die of diseases caused by unsafe water and poor hygiene; that figure is far higher than the number of deaths caused by violent conflict. Four people out of every 10 in the developing world are affected by water shortages. The situation is deteriorating because of demographic growth, urban sprawl, pollution and the impact of climate change.

Should the international community resign itself to this sorrowful assessment? We hope not. The time has come for us to come to our senses, appeal to people's consciences and mobilize the search for sustainable solutions. The organization of this meeting is already, in and of itself, a form of recognition of the gravity of the situation and a call to action. We must not stop at words but act together, and quickly.

I cannot but regret the fact that this debate, which is so important to the lives of millions of people across the planet, is taking place in a General Assembly Hall that is practically empty. That does not herald any deep or massive commitment on the part of the international community to this fundamental right.

Morocco is a willing and energetic participant in this new collective awareness-raising. My country supports any international effort to give full recognition to the universal right to water and sanitation. Morocco welcomed the adoption of resolution 64/292 in July 2010.

My country's commitment to recognizing the right to water is not new. Since winning its independence, Morocco has made access to water a priority. In the 1960s, we launched a dam construction programme that has enabled us to increase our storage capacity to 17 billion cubic metres. Almost all of our urban population in Morocco has access to drinking water; in rural areas, 60 per cent have such access. The

construction of hundreds of water purification plants in small and medium-sized Moroccan towns has led to great achievements in terms of wastewater treatment.

The modernization of the legislative and administrative framework has allowed for changes to water resource management by increasing supply through demand management and resource protection. In October 2009, His Majesty Mohammed VI declared that

> "our present and future challenge is to work tirelessly to master our resources, where economy in their use, the maximization of their value, expediency in their organization and preservation of their quality will be the basis of our development methods".

At the regional and international levels, my country has always stood shoulder to shoulder with countries facing economic, social and human difficulties linked to access to water. In the context of active, voluntary and dynamic South-South cooperation characterized by exchanges of experience, Morocco has provided assistance to brother countries, in particular in Africa, such as on artificial rainfall. My country has also been very aware of the situation of countries affected by climate change, in particular island countries, and by drought, as is unfortunately currently the case in the Horn of Africa.

Only international joint action will enable future generations to have adequate access to water. However, how can we not be concerned when the United Nations declares that by 2025, two-thirds of the global population, or 5.5 billion people, could live in areas affected by moderate or serious water stress. In Africa, 25 per cent of the population is already in a situation of extreme water stress. The drought-driven exodus from the Horn of Africa fully justifies today's debate. Respect for human dignity begins with the enshrinement of the universal right to water. It is time to unite and to act, since our prime responsibility in this body is, above all, to help save lives by ensuring access to the source of all life on Earth. I would say that water is essential to all life on Earth.

When I commented on the fact that this debate is taking place before an almost empty Assembly Hall, it was not to single anybody out, but only to deplore the fact that such a basic, fundamental and seminal human right can be addressed with, I will not say indifference, but little enthusiasm.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the President for having convened this plenary. Allow me, through him, to welcome the participation of His Excellency the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, our companion and brother Evo Morales Ayma, in this afternoon's debate.

The reports of United Nations agencies and bodies indicate that access to water and sanitation is unequal across the world. They reveal the existing polarities among regions and countries with regard to the enjoyment of such rights. Access to water and sanitation is a human right that must be ensured for all men and women on Earth. The fact that a wealthy minority monopolizes the benefits and enjoyment of the gifts of Mother Earth, while almost a billion people lack access to drinking water, is to be condemned. Some 2.6 billion people lack acceptable sanitation facilities, while that same minority flaunts the obscene extravagances that they enjoy in the contrived and alienating capitalist market.

Every day, between 4,000 and 5,000 children die as a result of lack of access to drinking water. The root causes can be found in poverty, economic and social inequality, climate change, the destruction of natural resources and the unfair balance of power that characterize the global capitalist system.

Will humankind be able to reverse such destructive trends, which annihilate life, and to create a more democratic, just and pluralistic society conducive to the preservation of life? We believe that that is possible. In order to ensure that humankind can exercise fundamental human rights, including access to water and sanitation, and achieve its freedom, we must uproot the narrow and miserly foundation of economic competition and market fundamentalism and make way for the reign of world solidarity.

In Venezuela, the human right to water and sanitation is ensured. Our country has a legal provision that recognizes the nation's full sovereignty over water, that access to water is a fundamental right and that water is vital to life and human well-being and an essential resource for development.

This afternoon, His Excellency President Evo Morales Ayma said that water is the mother of all rights. We hear him. If that right is not upheld, no human right will be respected. I would add that water delivery must be a public service, not a source of

wealth and trade. He called on us to seek a balance between human beings and nature. We fully share such humanist principles.

Venezuela's water-related legislation establishes that water is a social good. Therefore, the State ensures access to water to all communities, urban and rural, including indigenous peoples and all vulnerable social groups. The law also guarantees that, in full exercise of sovereignty and national security, foreign companies can never be allowed to exploit any water source anywhere. Water is a public good. It cannot be privately owned by any natural or legal person.

The United Nations established a Millennium Development Goal aimed at halving the percentage of people without sustainable access to drinking water by 2015. Venezuela achieved the Goal of drinking water coverage in 2001 by building networks to reduce to 15 per cent the number of people without drinking water. The goal of sanitation service coverage was reached in 2005 by building networks to reduce the number of people without sanitation services.

More than 95 per cent of the population of Venezuela today has access to drinking water. Our country, in the context of the Bolivarian revolution, has established major infrastructures for the capture, harnessing, purification and supply of drinking water, resulting in a total production capacity that can provide enough water for the 30 million people living in Venezuela. Our country also met the sanitation objective, achieving coverage of 92 per cent by means of our national plan aimed at expanding access to drinking water and sanitation.

Allow me to conclude by voicing my country's hope that the contributions made by the various delegations that have spoken in this debate will serve as an incentive to ensure that the right to water and sanitation can be enjoyed by all human beings on this planet.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.